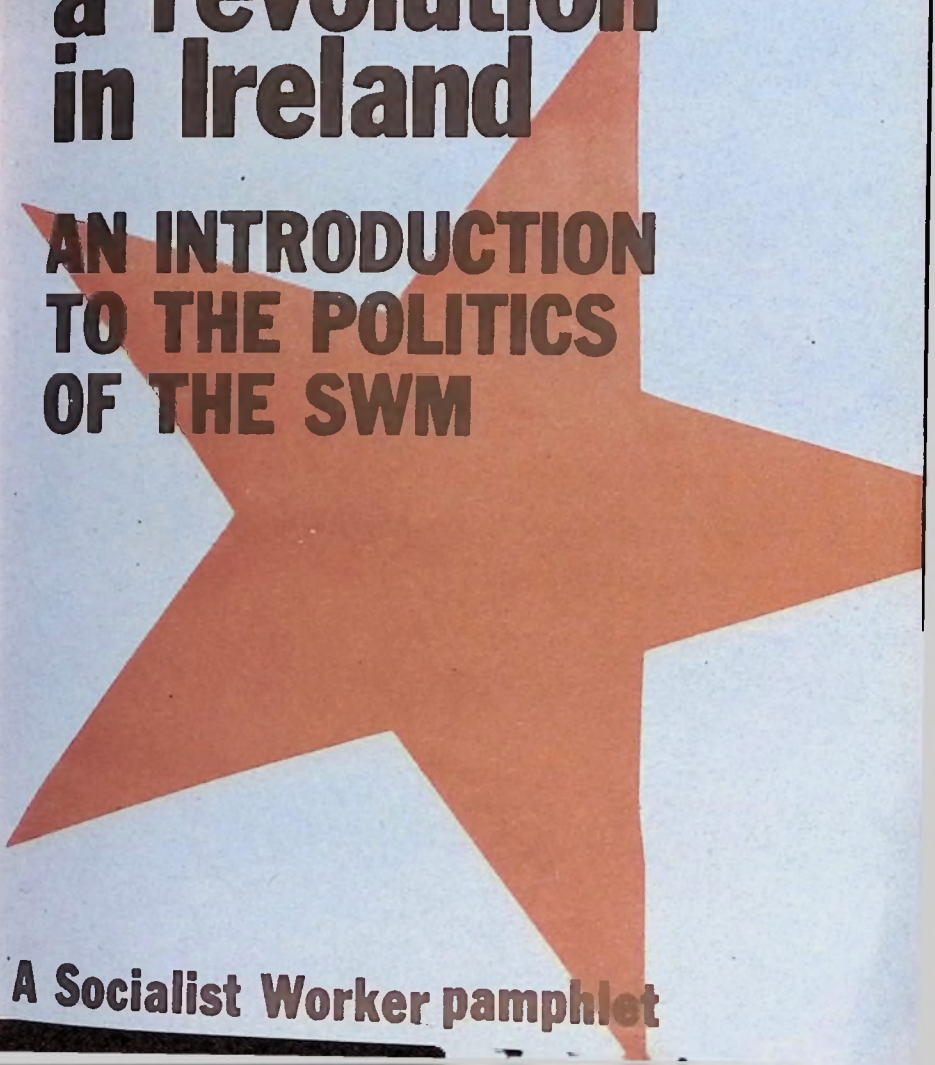
Why we need a revolution in Ireland

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POLITICS OF THE SWM



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1: Introduction

WE LIVE in a society that is divided into classes, in which a few people have vast amounts of property and most of us have none, in which the working class creates the wealth and the ruling class controls the wealth.

Today the ruling class — the tiny minority which controls and dominates our lives — is the capitalist class. We sometimes have the idea that a capitalist is anyone who is rich or owns a few houses or has a good job. In fact, a capitalist is someone who owns the "means of production". The means of production are the tools, machines, factories and raw materials which workers put to use to produce the things we all need.

Capitalism is the system of production where the ownership of the means of production is in the hands of a few people. For example, in Ireland over 75 per cent of the wealth is owned by just 5 per cent of the population. The wealth produced depends on the labour of those who work in the factories, mines and offices. As every strike shows, when this labour is withdrawn production is paralysed. Yet the workers do not control the system. This is because the capitalists own the means of production and so can force everyone else to sell them the labour to produce goods.

The people who sell their labour to the capitalists form a class too — the working class. Capitalists exploit the workers' labour by paying them much less than the amount of wealth they produce.

The capitalist form of production, then, depends on two conditions:

1 Wealth concentrated in the hands of a small capitalist class through its ownership of the means of production;

2 Masses of people whose only way of making a living is by selling their labour power to the capitalist.

It is this system which is at the root of world poverty, war, oppression and exploitation. It is this system which revolutionary socialists want to overthrow and replace with workers' control and socialism.

Capitalism is an international economic system. It has left millions of people without enough to eat. Even Bob Geldof's charity spectaculars have only slightly relieved the suffering. The ruling class used Live Aid to pretend that it was concerned and to trot out the old lies about famine being caused by drought or the inability of poorer countries to feed themselves. All of this hides the real reason which is that food production and the price at which food is sold are dependant on the fortunes of the world market.

In 1982 the US government was holding enough dried milk for each person on this planet to have four pounds, enough butter for everyone to have two pounds and enough cheese for three pounds per person. The storing of this food cost US tax-payers half a million dollars an *hour*. The reason was to keep food prices — and therefore profits — high.

Each year every man, woman and child in Europe pays £66 per head to subsidise the big farmers for producing food. The result is again, huge beef and butter mountains. EEC food reserves could feed the whole population of Africa five times over. But instead, the EEC "dumps" such food on the world market outside the EEC at a price which undercuts the starving peasants of Africa.

Capitalism causes worldwide oppression and poverty. Billions of pounds are spent on nuclear weapons each year while working class living standards are decimated by cut-backs in social services. Racial discrimination and oppression of all kinds are all designed to keep the rich in control.

Ireland, because it is part of the international capitalist system, suffers the same slumps, the same contradictions and the same crises as other countries in the world. And worldwide, the system has entered a deep crisis. The half a million on the dole, North and South in Ireland, is reflected everywhere else: four million in the UK, 12 million in the US.

The capitalist answer is, in their terms, simple. Make workers pay — cut unemployment and disability benefit; limit wage demands; cut the health service; give the owners of the factories and the banks more profits and maybe they'll take on more workers. Yet still millions disappear from the Irish economy in "black holes" that cannot be explained. Despite all the incentives to private enterprise, unemployment and emigration keep rising.

We believe that nothing short of a social transformation of society is necessary. Workers must challenge the system itself, take control of the means of production and build socialism. To many people this seems a very tall order and even a bit "extreme". This pamphlet answers this response. It outlines the revolutionary socialist position, the politics of the Socialist Workers Movement. It attempts to answer many of the questions which marxists are asked and to discard some of the myths. It expands on our statement of principles — "What we stand for" — which appears every month in our monthly paper *Socialist Worker*.

2: What would you put in its place?

IT IS becoming more and more obvious that capitalism must go. One in three in Ireland lives in poverty. Over seventy per cent of all houses are built by private speculators and many young people can't afford to buy. Schools are overcrowded. Only about five per cent of working class kids get to college.

In this class society, most workers have either no work or else have low-paid, dead-end jobs. Spending on social services in the 26 counties is the lowest in Europe. Each wage packet, on average, supports at least three people. And yet Southern Ireland has also Europe's lowest rate of tax on profits.

Workers' control would end capitalist exploitation and bring about a system where goods and services are produced and pro-vided, not for the profits of the capitalists, but for the needs of the people. When the waste of unemployment is done away with, when the huge costs of competition are abolished (overproduction, fancy packaging, advertising), when farmers are not afraid that producing as much food as they can will mean that they will not be able to sell it, then there will be no need for anyone, anywhere in the world to go hungry, no need for anyone to live in run-down, overcrowded conditions, no need for anyone to be on the dole.

We cannot provide a plan of exactly how socialism would be and ask people to follow it A to Z. Until capitalism is overthrown by the working class we can't get down to the business of building socialism. But there is one very important point we can make. It is important because so many countries call themselves socialist. Socialism means the highest level of democratic control from the bottom of the system to the top. It is not, as some people make out, simply about planning what is produced. It is about workers' *control* of production.

It is a basic idea of marxism that the working class has to emancipate itself through its own collective action. Freedom and socialism will not be *given* to the workers, it has to be struggled for and won by the working class itself. Workers are the exploited class in society. It is by their labour that capitalism survives. It is only when workers have control over their own labour for the benefit of the whole society that we will have the material base needed to build socialism.

We have already said that we do not draw up a plan for a workers' state. But we can look to the past when workers — by collective

action — drove a body-blow to capitalism and the capitalist class. Some of the great struggles shook the world, while some were short-lived but still important in working class history. All give some idea of what workers' power might look like.

In March of 1871, the French army admitted defeat at the hands of Prussia. Fearing a Prussian take-over of France, the workers of Paris rose up and took control of their city. For two short months the workers ruled Paris — until their uprising was drowned in blood. In order to secure their rule, the Parisian workers took a number of popular democratic steps. They suppressed the regular army and replaced it with a workers' militia. They established the right of workers to recall and replace their elected representatives at any time. They decreed that no elected representative could earn more than the average wage of a worker. They instituted free education — for girls as well as boys. It was the first time in history that workers had taken power. It was short-lived but it proved that workers' self-emancipation was no dream.

In February 1917 Russian working women took to the streets demanding bread and peace. The demonstration sparked a wave of revolution against the Tsar. Workers' Councils or *Soviets* became the new decision-making bodies. Delegates, like those in the Paris Commune, were subject to immediate recall by the electors. The Soviets had real power and became the foundation of the first ever workers' state. The American socialist and journalist John Reed who was in Russia at the time said:

"At least twice a year delegates are elected from all over Russia to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets . . . This body has about two thousand delegates and meets in the form of a great soviet which debates and decides all essentials of national policy . . . This augmented Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviets is the parliament of the Russian Republic."

The soviets, Reed stressed, were active, democratic organisations and had real power over the state. Workers' power was a reality.

Soviets emerged in Germany and Hungary following the Russian Revolution and even though short-lived, showed the real possibility of the working class overthrowing capitalism.

In 1936 in Spain, the working class and the poor farmers rose against a military coup led by General Franco. Within a year the fascist threat had been beaten back in almost every major town by the workers' militia. Landed estates and factories were seized. The workers of Spain were put down by the fascists, but for a while a workers' republic was on the cards.

The international socialist message has always battled against huge odds. Capitalists and their bourgeois politicians and "historians" say that workers' power and socialism are utopian dreams and that those who fight for socialism are either naive idealists or power-hungry fanatics. But the massive struggles that have occurred prove that workers can be broken from these ideas.

And it is not all ancient history either. In 1974 the liberation movement in Angola defeated the old Portugese rulers and its army. In Portugal itself this gave a huge boost to thousands and thousands of workers in their struggle to overthrow the fascist government of Caetano. By June 1975, workers' councils had been set up in the industrial areas. Combines were formed with workers' delegates coming together from major factories like Plessey, STC, ITT, etc. In some cases, like the wool and textile industries, the docks and the steel industry, socialist workers produced newspapers for entire industries. It's true that the ruling class was not defeated in Portugal, but when the winning of power is on the cards again, revolutionaries will take the lessons of the past into account to maximise the prospects of victory.

Here in Ireland we are often given the impression by history books and the media that the only struggle in Ireland has been the struggle against British imperialism. Working class struggle is usually ignored and, in fact, its history suppressed. For example, during the period 1918-22, as the struggle for national independence took place, workers, small farmers and landless labourers at local and workplace level took independent action of a revolutionary nature for their own social and class demands.

In the spring of 1920, land seizures began in the west. In May, ITGWU members of Knocklong creamery, County Limerick, seized control of the plant and ran up the red flag. They continued to run the factory under the slogan **"We make butter, not profits"**.

The truce of 1921 brought a host of land and workplace seizures. In Cork the harbour board was taken over. In Drogheda a factory was seized. In Arigna workers took over the mines. In May 1922 workers' councils were organised in a dozen Munster factories. There are many more examples but the point is clear. The fight to build socialism in this country is part and parcel of an international fight. A fight by the oppressed working class against its ruling class enemies.

3: Why Marxism?

ONLY THE working class by its collective action can overthrow capitalism and build socialism. This is the most important idea Marx has given socialists today.

Marx was not the first person to see that something was wrong with society and had to be put right. But most of the others thought that things were wrong because people — through ignorance or mistake — had wrong ideas in their heads. They thought that changing the minds of rich and powerful people would be enough. For example, Robert Owen, the English cotton manufacturer and Utopian socialist, appealed to wealthy leaders of business to be "kinder" to their workers.

But of course, capitalism existed not principally because of ideas in people's heads but as the outcome of the *material* development of society. And these ideas were reflections of those material conditions. Marx said **"Man makes history but not in circumstances of his own choosing"**. Clearly something more than changing the ideas of the rich was needed. This materialist approach put the quest for socialism on a scientific footing. This is why we marxists describe our political philosophy as "scientific socialism".

Marx's ideas did not come out of the blue. Between 1830 and 1848 there was a massive upsurge of workers struggles right across Europe. What Marx saw of the power of the working class in the huge strikes in Britain and the revolutionary workers' struggles in France and Germany made him start a thorough, scientific study of the nature of the capitalist economy and class society. He concluded that if socialism was to mean anything it had to be achieved through a process in which workers, as the exploited class, liberated themselves.

Unlike other "socialists" who looked to an elite of "experts" or "intellectuals" or soldiers to change things *for* the masses, Marx argued that the working class itself had to achieve its own emancipation.Therefore he wrote in the first statement of aims to the International Workingmen's Association (the First International): **"The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class itself."**

Furthermore, Marx said, the development of capitalism itself drives workers into revolt against the system underwhich the wealth that they produce is robbed from them. We need to look at why this is so.

Because the means of production are owned by the capitalists, most people can only make a living if the capitalist allow them to

work at and with those means of production. If we are to earn anything more than the rock bottom subsistence which those on the dole get, we must sell our labour power, our ability to work, to the capitalist controllers of the economy.

Why do these capitalist employ workers? Is it out of the goodness of their hearts, or because they want to contribute to the economy by "providing jobs"? Of course not. It's because it is upon workers that they depend for their wealth. Production under capitalism does not take place to meet people's needs. Its aim is *profit*. Goods are produced to be sold on the market. They realise a profit when their price is higher than what it cost to produce them.

Machines and raw materials only produce goods when labour power is applied to them. For example, steel turns into a refrigerator or wool into cloth or wood into a chair. The crucial element, the factor common to all production, is labour. Even robots need to be turned on, repaired, etc.

Without labour, then, production grinds to a halt, the lights go out, the buses stop — as any strike shows us. But workers spend only part of the working day producing the equivalent of their daily wages. But the worker works on until the end of the working day and what is produced is the profit for the capitalist.

It is this **surplus value** as Marx called it — what the workers produce for the capitalist after replacing the value of their wages — that is the source of all profit. The wealth of the capitalist derives from the exploitation of workers — from the way in which the workers are compelled to work for the capitalist, not only to replace their wages, but to create profit. Profits may be high or low in a particular firm but the point still remains that it is the working class that is the source of all profit.

James Connolly had this to say on the subject of profit:
"The owners who receive the profit that is made, do not themselves work. They employ others to work for them. Shareholders make vast profits, but labour alone is the source of all wealth. The amount of labour necessary to produce an article under average social conditions governs its exchange value . . . If you do not believe labour costs govern the exchange value of a commodity ask a Dublin master builder to tell you what factors he takes into account when he is asked to give an estimate for building an altar. If he were a Protestant he will cast up his estimate with the same items as if he were a Catholic — that is to say, he will count the cost of labour, including the cost of labour embodied in the raw materials and he will base his estimate upon that cost."

Time and time again before he was shot for his part in the 1916

rising, James Connolly hammered home the scientific marxist understanding of the nature of class conflict in capitalist society. It is not simply that there are rich and poor, employed or unemployed or those who have made it to the top and those of us who have not. The basis of poverty and exploitation is to be found in the fact that the working class is robbed every day of part of the value they create by their labour. This how the small minority which is the capitalist class get richer, while workers are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet.

"The accumulation of wealth on the one hand, and poverty on the other." That was how Marx summed up the essence of capitalism. Because every capitalist who wants to stay rich, or even survive in business, has to make sure his workers work as hard as possible. He also has to make sure that they're working with the most up to date machinery, so that their labour produces as many goods in an hour as does the labour of those working for other capitalists.

A capitalist who wants to stay in business has to make sure that he owns ever-increasing amounts of means of production — or as Marx put it, to **accumulate capital.**

Capitalism then is a *competitive* system. No single capitalist dominates the economy. Instead a number of different capitalists compete with each other for markets. It is their economic rivalries which force capitalists to continually accumulate by reinvesting profits.

The capitalist who has the lowest costs is likely to dominate the market. So each must invest in improved machinery which will increase the productivity of his workers, and thus give him an edge over his rivals. Any capitalist who fails to keep up will eventually be driven out of business.

So production does not take place to satisfy human need — even the human needs of the capitalist class — but in order to enable one capitalist to survive in competition with another capitalist. The workers employed by each capitalist find their lives dominated by the drive of their employers to accumulate faster than their rivals.

The problem with competition and accumulation though is that in order to squeeze the profit out of the worker, the capitalist must invest more and more in expensive machinery and technology. So for the same profit a greater amount of capital must be invested. So the rate of profit — the return on every pound invested — tends to fall. Sooner or later the rate of profit falls to a level where capitalists are unwilling to invest in fresh production — workers are laid off and the economy stagnates.

More than this, the capitalist pays the workers much less than the value of what the workers produce — this is where the capitalist's profit comes from. But as the economy stagnates, how are all the goods produced to be sold if demand for machines, etc, is low — because capitalists don't want to invest, and workers — because of low pay — can't afford to buy much?

The answer is that goods remain unsold. Factories go onto short-time or close down completely and workers have even less money in their pockets. Less and less is purchased, more and more workers are laid off and the economy nose-dives into a slump. These **crises of over-production** have plagued capitalism from the very beginning.

In the past, however, capitalism recovered from these slumps by allowing smaller or less efficient firms to go bust. The others could then buy up their plant and equipment cheaply.

This whole process goes on until profits have again risen to a level at which the capitalists are again prepared to invest in industry. Workers are taken on, there is more money around so demand for goods rises, and the economy begins to pick up. This carries on until the economy is booming and the whole cycle starts off again.

Why shouldn't this succession of booms and slumps go on for ever? One very good reason is that capitalism has changed. The hundreds of small individual employers of a hundred years ago are replaced by vast multinational corporations. These firms are just *so* big that if any of them goes bust, it threatens to pull the others down with it.

In Ireland there are just five companies which control sales of over £3 billion. They are Jefferson Smurfit, Bord Bainne, ESB, Digital and Powers Supermarkets Ltd. Giants like Waterford Glass, Cement Roadstone and Esso Teo. are totally connected to the world economy.

If any of these firms were to go bust, it would have a disastrous effect on the economy. If a number of them went under, it could break the back of the Irish economy *and* have serious economic effects internationally.

Each slump is becoming harder for the capitalist system to overcome. These crises have deep roots within capitalism. They can be finally ended only by abolishing capitalism and replacing it with workers' power. Collective democratic control on a world scale would end the chaos of a system which staggers from slump to boom and back to slump again. Socialism would harness the immense productive powers created by capitalism — but it would use those powers to meet people's needs, not for the pursuit of profit. The working people of the world would cooperate together, instead of being divided into warring nation-states.

4: Why the working class?

KARL MARX began the *Communist Manifesto* with the statement that *"the history of all previously existing societies has been the history of class struggle".*

At each stage in the development of society — from ancient Rome through feudal times to the present day — there has been an oppressed class whose physical labour created the wealth. And, as Marx pointed out, the workers have rarely accepted their lot without fighting back. There were slave revolts in ancient Greece and Rome, peasant uprisings in medieval Europe and great civil wars and revolutions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

But all these struggles ended with the replacing of one privileged ruling minority by another. For example, during the French Revolution, it was the *Bras Nus* — the poorer classes of Paris — who made the greatest efforts, but in the end it was not they who controlled society instead of the king — it was the bankers and industrialists.

The failure of the oppressed classes to keep control of the revolutions in which they fought can be explained by the general low level of wealth in society, but more importantly by the fact that the life of these people did not prepare them to run society. The majority were illiterate, they had little idea of what things were like outside of their own immediate locality and, above all, their everyday life divided them one against the other. Each peasant family had to worry about its own plot of land; each craftsman about his own small business; each was to some extent in competition with the others, not united with them.

But the workers who create the wealth under modern capitalism differ from all previous lower classes. First of all they create so much wealth that there is more than enough to divide it up equally, feed the whole world, and still have enough wealth to allow a flowering of the arts, science and so on. But once again, of most importance is that their everyday life *does* prepare them to take control of society.

For under capitalism workers have to be skilled and educated. They have to be brought together in huge workplaces in large cities where they are in close contact with each other. Capitalism make workers cooperate everyday at work. Each person on an assembly line has to do her or his bit if the next is to be able to do their's. Each typist types his or her part of a report before someone else takes it to be photo-copied and someone else collates and binds it. The nurse has to cooperate with the orderly and doctor if patients are to get proper care. Those of us who have jobs cooperate with other workers every day.

All of this means that the working class can be a force which not only rebels against existing society but can organise itself, electing and controlling its own forms of government, so as to change society in its own interests and not just set up another Taoiseach or group of bankers.

Why then don't workers just use their collective power and take over?

Workers are constantly being told that they're not able to run things — from school, in the papers and on television. We're told that workers can only follow orders and that this is the way things should be.

But there is one point at which workers challenge this idea: when the collective power that runs factories, officies, hospitals and railways is used to stop them. And this is very important. Lenin said that every strike, however limited its goal, carries within it the embryo of socialism.

After all, what is socialism? With the frills removed, it is workers collectively running society. Instead of being prisoners of chaotic, capitalist competition and the mad rush for profits at any cost, it is working together for the common good. Workers' tremendous co-operative power would be controlled, not by a ruling class in search of ever-greater profits, but democratically and for the fulfillment of human need.

This doesn't mean that strikers set out consciously with socialist goals in mind. But collective action is the only way to win a strike, so the logic of workers' position under capitalism — collective action in production, collective action in struggle — takes us in a socialist direction.

And once involved in struggle, people's ideas change. They gain confidence, gain a sense of their ability to change their own lives, their ability to control things. That's why many workers who start out on strike with very sexist and racist ideas can find these ideas challenged by their experience in struggle. Often even experienced revolutionaries are amazed at how quickly workers lose these ruling class ideas.

That's why we in the Socialist Workers Movement get involved in workers' struggles. Because only in struggle can significant numbers of people be won to socialist politics. And that's why Marx said that **"the emancipation of the working class can only be brought about by the working class itself".**

5: But look what happened in Russia

EVERY SOCIALIST is confronted with the question of what happened in Russia. For many working people the idea of socialism or communism is completely identified with Russia or Eastern Europe. Very few workers show the slightest enthusiasm for exchanging the system we live under for that which exists there. And quite rightly. Russia and Eastern European countries *are* tyrannies. Workers there are every bit as exploited as here, women and minority groups are oppressed, society is ruled by a small bureaucratic clique.

But socialism has nothing to do with the system in Russia, whatever the Russian government calls itself. To answer the question about what happened in Russia we have to look at the history of Russia over the last 80 or more years.

In the 1890s the government of Russia began to encourage industrialisation. They were afraid that otherwise the country would fall back in the arms race with the more advanced powers like Germany and Britain. As a result of the build up of industry, a small but economically and politically powerful industrial working class emerged in the main cities.

In October 1917, it was the working class — led by the Bolshevik Party — which made the socialist revolution. The Bolsheviks had built up majority support in the soviets — the workers' councils — in the eight months since the Tsar had been deposed. When the Bolsheviks gave the call for revolution, it was answered immediately by the mass of working people who overthrew the capitalist government without any difficulty and with little violence.

The revolution was led by the Bolsheviks but it was carried through by the industrial working class. The Bolsheviks had more than a quarter of a million members at the time of the revolution, and those members, through action, organisation and and argument had by their example gained clear majorities in most of the soviets.

It was the most exciting moment in history. The masses of working people now saw the possibility of controlling their own lives and their own production. The structure of power set up after the revolution fitted this control. Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, is often painted as some sort of dictator. In fact, he was the opposite. Just after the revolution he wrote:

"I calculate *solely and exclusively* on the workers, soldiers and peasants being able to tackle better than the officials, better than the police, the practical and difficult problems of increasing the production of foodstuffs and their better distribution, the better provision of soldiers, etc, etc."

The soviets which took power after the revolution were based on the belief that power must come from below. Local soviets were elected through workers' collectives in factories around which were gathered all the people who wanted to vote but were not working: old people, women who were looking after young children and so on. The members of the soviets were not members of the mercs and perks brigade. Their salaries were based on the average salaries of the people they represented. They were subject to instant recall by the people who had elected them. These soviets then elected delegates to the full-time All Russian Executive of Soviets and to the All Russian Congress of Soviets which met at regular intervals.

Perhaps the clearest sign of the astonishing power of the revolution was the change in the role of women. Tsarist Russia had been backward in every sense but particularly in its oppression of women. In a flash the revolution turned this on its head. Women forced their way into the leadership of many of the soviets. A number of laws were passed establishing the right to free abortion, free contraception and did away with the old "legitimacy" laws about marriage and children.

But the western capitalist rulers did not take the revolution lying down. 22 armies invaded Russia as ruling classes all over the world responded in the only way they knew — with violence.

Civil war

Millions of people perished from the war, starvation and disease in the three years of the civil war. The effect of the war on industry was disastrous. With no markets or raw materials the factories had to close down. The industrial working class, on which the Bolsheviks had based their strength, disintegrated.

The Bolsheviks, when they finally emerged victorious from the civil war in 1921, found themselves in a precarious situation. The disappearance of the working class as a collective, cohesive class, left them controlling the state machine but without a social base. The peasants had supported them against the counter-revolutionaries during the civil war, fearing a return of the old landowners. But now the old oppressors had been routed, Bolshevik seizures of grain to feed the towns were provoking peasant hostility.

In the spring of 1921 Lenin introduced the "New Economic Policy" (NEP). It was an attempt to help rebuild the industries after

the civil war. To some degree it restored the private market for food — a major concession to defuse peasant hostility — and put factories into the hands of managers. This made things better for a while but did nothing to solve the real problems.

Even before the revolution, Lenin and Trotsky knew that a Russian soviet republic could never survive on its own. They expected the October Revolution to spark off a wave of revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries of the west. They argues that no single country could build socialism on its own: that it would require the pooled resources of all the major countries.

The Bolsheviks knew that without international revolutions the Russian working class would be isolated. Therefore they used all their abilities to stimulate revolution in other countries.

It didn't come. The German revolution of 1919 to 1923 was beaten back. The Hungarian communist government was toppled in 1919. In France and Britain the reformist illusions of workers induced them to "have a try" at electing Labour parties into government — which promptly used their influence to dissipate and diffuse mass discontent. The Russian revolution was isolated — and the revolutionary working class of Russia, through exhaustion, dispersion and disorganisation had for practical purposes ceased to exist.

In the vacuum, slowly at first, and then with increasing confidence reactionary forces in Russia took power. Under the leadership of Stalin, the soviets lost their influence — and their democracy. The right to dissent in them, or anywhere else, was denied.

In the factories and workplaces, all power was assumed by a handful of bureaucrats. Gradually, these bureaucrats started to demand wealth and privilege to go with their "enhanced position".

The priorities of production, forced on Russia by the need to compete with a capitalist world, assumed capitalist proportions. There was no stock exchange, no dividends. But the bureaucracy, with its army, its secret police, its privileges and perks, assumed the role of the ruling class. Russia became a state-capitalist country, with its workers as impotent and exploited as anywhere else in the world.

Stalin practically announced this in 1931 when he said to a conference of industrial managers:

"1. It is necessary to be done with the foolishness of egalitarianism. Better pay for better work;
"2. A greater differentiation must be made between skilled and unskilled;
"3. Business accounting must be introduced in order that an increase in accumulation and a lowering of production costs be achieved."

In fact, despite their apparent differences, the economies of Russia and western Europe are very similar. We saw that capitalism involves accumulation. In other words capitalists constantly reinvest profits in further expanding production. The same is true of Russia. The goal of production is not the needs of the mass of the people. Quite the opposite. Their living standards are even lower than our own. Instead, resources are constantly poured into building up heavy industry. Consumption is sacrificed to production.

Why do the Russian ruling class do this? For exactly the same reason that capitalists accumulate in the West — because of competition. Except that in Russia's case the competition is less economic than military. Some 15 per cent of Gross National product in the USSR is devoted to military spending. Everything else is sacrificed to keeping up in the arms race.

This is exactly the same sort of arrangement that we find in western capitalism. Here firms are forced to reinvest their profits because if they don't they will be forced out of business by their rivals. Russia is forced to concentrate on building up heavy industry because otherwise it will be wiped out by America.

The only difference is that while it is firms that compete in the West, the arms race takes place between states. What we have in Russia is *state* capitalism. The state owns the economy, and the central bureaucracy runs the state. It is they who form the capitalist class in Russia.

As Tony Cliff explains in his book *State Capitalism in Russia*, **"The bureaucracy fulfills the tasks of the capitalist class, and by doing so transforms itself into a class."**

Anyone who doubts this should look at what has happened in eastern Europe in the past thirty years. After the second world war the Russians seized military control of eastern Europe and used their armed might to transform these countries into state capitalist societies.

The result has been wave after wave of working class revolt against local rulers and their backers in Moscow. Workers rose up in Berlin in 1953, Hungary and Poland in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland again in 1971, 1976 and 1981-82. In late 1986, China's state-capitalist regime was shaken by student revolts. If these countries are socialists, run in the interests of the working class, why has it so often been necessary for workers to rebel against them?

A lot of people use the example of Russia to say that any attempt at socialism will always end up as state capitalism. But it is not inevitable. If the revolution had been spread, things would have been

totally different. And even in Ireland today, if a workers' state were to be established, it would need the solidarity of workers in other countries who were willing to challenge their own capitalist class. An isolated Irish workers' state — *any* isolated workers' state — would not last long if it was not part of an international struggle against the capitalist system.

Today, capitalism is far more international than in the days of the Russian Revolution. A revolution in any of the advanced countries would have a tremendous effect on workers all over the world. The crisis that will open the door to workers' power in one country will be opening the door in other countries at the same time. It is our job as socialists that when that happens, real socialism wins out.

6: Can't the system be reformed?

BUT HOW do we achieve socialism? The Labour Party and the Workers Party argue that the ballot box and the Dail is the safest and surest method. They look to the other countries of western Europe where workers have placed their hopes in Labour and Social Democratic parties who work through parliament.

The argument runs like this: There are only a few capitalists and there are many workers. At the ballot box the votes of Tony O'Reilly and Michael Smurfit are equal to the votes of a cook and a Corporation worker. If workers vote socialist parties into power, then TDs can use the state machine to impose laws on the bosses. Socialism will be gradually achieved through transferring more power from the capitalists to the workers. This method has the advantage of being peaceful and democratic.

But the ballot box has been in existence since the beginning of this century. We are still no nearer to socialism — despite long periods in office of social democratic parties in countries like Britain, Sweden and Germany. The problem is that the reformist strategy has nothing to do with the working class liberating themselves. All workers are required to do is to passively vote and to wait for their elected representatives to deliver socialism.

This can be seen clearly in the way parties like Labour and the Workers Party operate. It is only at election times that these parties become active. They are not involved in supporting workers' struggles and developing solidarity with strikes. Indeed, on occasions both these parties have denounced strikers for being "ultra-left".

Their day-to-day activity is centred around advice centres or the "clinic". Their TDs function as super social workers who attempt to solve individual problems by negotiating with the local government bureaucracy. In many cases they win votes not by their record of militancy and struggle by the amount of cases they have solved. Although they may talk of changing the system, their own practice encourages people to look for a Mr Fixit. The scandal is that they operate a type of patronage system in exactly the same way as Fianna Fail or Fine Gael. People are led to believe that what is rightfully their's was "got" by an efficient TD or councillor.

But what if the Labour Party or Workers Party was to win a majority in the Dail through these methods? Wouldn't it be worth it?

The problem is that revolutionaries do not object to reformist methods because we are morally for workers' self-activity. The truth is that even if Labour or the Workers Party were ever to achieve a majority in the Dail — they *could not* introduce socialism. There are a number of reasons for this.

Every school-kid is taught that the Dail or parliament in any country is sovereign. It is a lie. The power in capitalist society does not lie inside the chambers of parliament — it lies in the boardrooms of industry. Those who own and control the factories, the means of production, determine how a country is run. Even when governments do not claim to be socialist, they still have to bow to the demands of big business.

Take Alan Dukes. Now Dukes is no radical, but in 1983 he introduced a mild piece of legislation to close a loophole on the taxation of government bonds. It would have meant that the big speculators would pay the full tax on the interest of government bonds. Within hours of Dukes' announcement a champagne breakfast was held at Jury's Hotel to listen to the advice of a prominent "investment analyst". When the stock exchange opened £800 million was removed from government bonds. Dukes quickly withdrew the proposed legislation.

Or look at the government claims to plan the economy. Between 1979 and 1982, £2,000 million left the Irish economy in repatriated profits. It was only in 1984 that the elected government came to even know of the existence of this "black hole".

Even the mildest measures to restrain the greed of individual capitalists can be overturned by the unelected judiciary. Until recently there was a small number of rent-controlled properties in Dublin. But one sharp solicitor, Paddy Madegan, raised money from his fellow landlords and took the matter to court. An unelected judge, that

came from the same class as Madegan abolished rent control at the stroke of a pen. Pensioners who could not afford to pay for rent increases of six or seven hundred per cent found themselves evicted.

There is only one way to look at parliament. It is like a "house committee" for a group of tenants. The landlord owns the house and everything in it. But he has decided to give his tenants a voice. Everyone can vote in a couple of people to run the house — but no matter what they decide the landlord will always have the last word.

The examples discussed so far involved openly pro-capitalist governments. Social democratic reformist governments have suffered a far worse fate. Today capitalism is organised internationally. The multi-nationals operate on a global scale. Finance is lent or borrowed in money markets that are outside the control of any government. This gives tremendous power to capital when faced with reformist governments who operate within a national framework and who are pledged to support private property.

Reformism

In June 1981, the French Socialist Party swept to power. They promised to cut unemployment, to reflate the economy and to embark on a programme of nationalisation. Immediately an investment strike began. Money poured out of the country. The franc slumped. French capitalism was on strike.

Mitterrand surrendered. An austerity programme was imposed. Unemployment was forced up as thousands of miners and steel workers were thrown out of jobs. The French Socialist Party stooped to a racist campaign against migrant workers to find scapegoats for their own failures. The attempt to make life a little better left French workers demoralised and beaten.

Every attempt to reform the system from the top is bound to fail as the French example proved. A similar attempt in Ireland with its more open economy and dependence on the multi-nationals would not even get off the drawing board. The reason is simple. The power of capital cannot be broken by a few legislators in parliament. It demands the active participation of the mass of workers, organised at workplace level who are prepared to disregard every aspect of bourgeois legality.

France provides a recent example of this. In December 1986 a massive student strike forced Chirac's government to drop its right wing Education Bill. This fight, in turn, sparked off a huge strike by rail workers. If the Socialist Party had built on these struggles it would have achieved in a few weeks what it failed to achieve in five years of government. Unfortunately, reformist leaders fear mass mobilisation more than the class enemies they profess to fight.

The main fallacy of the reformist strategy is its belief that the state machine is neutral, that it can be used equally by the workers and by the employers. They ignore the simple truth uncovered by Marx that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machine and wield it for its own purposes." The reason for this is obvious. The main core of the present state machine — the bosses' state — is nothing but bodies of trained, well-paid men and women in arms. Their job is to defend the existing order from any threat. They will defend that order against parliament itself if necessary.

Anyone who doubts this should look at Chile. In 1970, Salvador Allende was elected to government on a programme that aimed to transform society by peaceful, constitutional means. When he survived all attempts at "destabilisation" by the business section, the army mounted a coup. The coup was legalised by the judiciary and blessed by the church hierarchy. Tens of thousands of socialists were murdered, tortured and exiled. The existing order was preserved by the state machine.

Those who doubt that such events could occur in Ireland should consider the level of repression that currently operates. Today, the secret police, the Special Branch, monitor political and trade union meetings. Each year almost a thousand people are arrested under the Offences Against the State Act. If the state forces are prepared to engage in that type of repression now — think of how they would act if a more serious challenge took place to the power of the class they represent.

Revolutionaries are often denounced as "undemocratic" for rejecting the parliamentary road to socialism on the basis of such hard evidence. In recent times, the leaders of the western world have taken to championing "democratic values". Anyone who questions the actual value of democracy under capitalism is denounced as a wrecker or the next of kin to a "terrorist".

Yet if you were to live to seventy-one you would only be given a chance to vote ten or twelve times in your life. At election times you are subjected to a barrage of propaganda from the media — most of which is privately owned. And no matter how you vote the capitalist class is still in control. You cannot even control the elected representatives once they take office.

Bourgeois democracy is extremely limited. It hides the naked dictatorship of the bosses over every minute of your working life. After every election you still return to a workplace where the managers and even the foremen dictate how goods are to be produced and how work is to be organised.

Revolutionaries are for an extension of democracy. As we have argued, socialism is not possible without the active participation of the vast majority of working people. In order to smash the system, workers' councils — which link delegates from every workplace — are necessary. In order to break the stranglehold of capital, workers' control has to be imposed on every factory and workplace. That means a tremendous expansion of democratic involvement.

Under socialism, then, workers democracy is not organised through the fig leaf of parliament. It has to spring from the workplace itself. It means the election of delegates who can immediately be recalled. It means report-backs to meetings where workers are involved in implementing socialism themselves. It means that the mass of working people are drawn into the administration of the workers' republic — rather than leaving politics in the hands of a privileged minority.

7: What about the border?

IRISH POLITICS have been dominated by "the border". Ever since the Civil Rights Movement in the late sixties, the issue of discrimination against Northern Catholics has been to the fore for a new generation of socialists. Initially the movement fought against the gerrymandering of Derry City Council where a Unionist majority was produced from a predominantly Catholic electorate. Today the middle class Catholics of the SDLP dominate Derry's council — but still the struggle goes on.

The reason is that the Civil Rights Movement opened a can of worms. Discrimination in Northern Ireland did not begin and end at the ballot box. It went to the very heart of the state. In his book *The Orange Order*, Michael Farrell recounted some of the following incidents:

Fermanagh 1969: 77 school bus drivers employed. Only three were Catholics;

Dungannon 1968: no Catholics on the council's white-collar staff;

Down 1951: 294 white-collar employees — only two per cent Catholics;

Between 1921 and 1945 Fermanagh Council did not build a single house lest it upset the Protestant majority on the council.

These incidents are neither accidental nor unique. When the Northern state was first established in 1921, 18,000 Catholic workers were driven from their jobs. Local councils in Catholic areas were disbanded. The illegal Ulster Volunteer Force became the backbone of the legal B Specials who were recruited from Orange Halls. In Brief, the state was founded on discrimination and bigotry.

Sixty years later that still remains the case. The replacement of Stormont with direct British rule has not removed sectarianism from the system. It has given it a more vicious twist. The skilled jobs in heavy industry are still predominantly Protestant. The B Specials are replaced but the UDR take their role. Catholic youth in the ghettoes of West Belfast and the Bogside now face the daily harassment of the British army. The Diplock Courts, the Supergrasses, the long periods of remand all ensure that Northern Ireland has proportionately one of the highest prison populations in the world.

The sectarianism that is built into the state has given rise to the IRA. The impasse that the Civil Rights Movement reached led the most militant of Catholic workers to the conclusion that the Northern state could not be reformed — it had to be smashed. The conclusion was absolutely correct. Revolutionary socialists stand on the same side as Republicans in the battle to smash the Northern state — whatever differences we may have with their politics.

Others do not see it like this. Critics of the republicans have tended to view them as dangerous fanatics who have "caused" the problem. That has proved the major justification for the build up of repression in the South. Unfortunately many on the left have gone half way along this road by seeing the conflict in Northern Ireland as a "tribal" one. The Workers Party and sections of the Irish Labour Party argue for a Bill of Rights to protect nationalist interests and in the meantime attempt to focus on issues that "unite" the working class. In this scenario, the extremists and "terrorists" should be put away while decent "socialists" go about the job of forging workers' "unity".

This approach is mistaken. First, the demand for a Bill of Rights begs the question of *who* will implement it. Although every state is established to protect the interests of the ruling class, it has to rest on institutions that persuade sections of other classes to participate in capitalist rule. In Northern Ireland, those institutions were established to discriminate against Catholics. The Northern state resulted from a fusion of the Orange Order with the Unionist Party. The very agents of the state — the RUC and the UDR — have proven themselves as thoroughly sectarian forces. Asking them to implement a

Bill of Rights is asking them to abolish themselves.

Second, working class unity cannot be built when discrimination is ignored. As long as the state is secure, it guarantees marginal privileges to Protestants in housing and jobs. This in turn lays the basis for the all-class Unionist monolith. On the other side, discrimination means that Catholic workers come to identify themselves more as Catholics than as workers. The greatest blow for working class unity would be the forced withdrawal of the British army. Only then would the mass of Protestant workers be forced to face the reality of losing marginal privileges and to see themselves as part of a wider *class*.

But how is the British army to be driven out? How is the Northern state to be smashed? The Northern Catholics are in a minority. Discrimination has ensured that they are excluded from political and economic power. This sets limits to any form of struggle against the Orange state. The impasse they find themselves in can only be broken either by breaking the hold of loyalism over Protestant workers or by winning support from the South.

There are problems on both counts. In the first place, loyalism is strengthened by the inability of Catholic workers to pose a threat to the state, while being unable to finally smash it. The splits that have developed in the unionist monolith have predominantly been to the right. Despite the wave of redundancies that have hit the Protestant industrial heartlands, the perspective of most Protestant workers has been to hold on even more firmly to their privileges and their state.

This is not to say that all Protestant workers are inevitably bound to loyalism. Their privileges *are* marginal. They have no objective interest in upholding those privileges above and beyond what could be achieved by united working class action. But given the grip of loyalism in the Protestant communities, any real lead in this direction will have to come from outside. It is only when the issue of a workers' republic is posed *practically*; where the alternative they face is not just a green Ireland but a workers' state in which they stand to gain, that loyalism can be successfully challenged. It is therefore only in the highpoint of a challenge against both Irish states that sections of Protestant workers will be broken from loyalism.

But there are also problems in Northern nationalists looking to the South. Officially, the Southern government presents itself as the custodian of their interests. In reality, the Southern ruling class has no interest in breaking with British imperialism and opposing partition in practice. They no longer regard themselves as oppressed by Britain's economic power as they have become integrated into a

world economy. They share the same concern as their British counterparts for enforcing "stability" on the whole island.

This has been demonstrated on a number of occasions. The level of co-operation on border security is one testimony to it. The chief of the RUC, Herman, for example argued that this co-operation was never better than when Charles Haughey was in power. Similarly, during the H Block crisis both Fianna Fail and the Coalition refused to break with Thatcher and preferred to keep going the "process of Anglo-Irish talks". More blatantly, Tony Benn revealed that when he was part of the British Labour government a discussion paper on troop withdrawal was scuttled on the insistence of the *Irish* government.

Not all the Irish people have an interest in smashing the Orange state. The only *class* in the South which Northern nationalists can look to is the working class. It alone has the capacity to fight against partition because it has no interest in upholding Irish capitalism. As part of its battle for power, it must take up all the major issues of society from its own class standpoint. Partition has ensured division and splintered its ranks. It cannot win unless it sets out to destroy partition.

But Southern workers will not involve themselves as a class in the fight against partition if it is only to replace the border with a 32 county capitalist republic. They would have little interest in joining the dole queues of the Falls and Shankill to those of Dublin and Cork. The only republic that workers have an interest in is a workers' republic. The fight against partition can succeed therefore only as a fight against both Irish states — which prop each other up.

Republicanism

The Republican Movement does not agree with this view. Although the organisation is overwhelmingly working class, and although it terms itself "democratic-socialist" it sees the conflict as a battle between the Irish nation and the British nation. At the heart of republicanism is an appeal to *all* the Irish people. The founder of the movement was indeed a revolutionary — but he was a fighter for his class, the then revolutionary class of Irish industrialists. Ever since Wolfe Tone, the republican movement has held the ambition of uniting all classes of Irishmen and women around it as a new Irish nation. That is why, for example, the leading left republican, Gerry Adams insisted to the press that **"there is no Marxist influence in Sinn Fein. There is no one in Sinn Fein who is a Marxist or who would be influenced**

by Marxism."

At the centre of its strategy is the "stages approach" to Irish politics. The first stage is the removal of the border. During this stage all classes of Irish people can be united around the patriotic banner. The second stage begins only after the border has been removed. Only then can normal politics develop. The problem with the strategy is that the border cannot be removed if the political leadership of the struggle does not start out from a working class standpoint now.

This was most tragically demonstrated during the H Block strike. After Bobby Sands died, tens of thousands of Southern workers stopped work — despite the advice of their union leaders. Yet at the National H Block Campaign's conference Sinn Fein rejected the strategy of directing the campaign towards the workplaces to spread the strikes. Instead it proposed to work for a "United Nationalist Front" that would involve the SDLP, Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church. It was precisely the classes which these organisations represented that were most terrified by the hunger strike. They did not lift a finger. Yet the reason why Sinn Fein looked to them was that without a class view of society it was forced to turn to the most powerful and respectable elements in time of crisis.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was met by massive loyalist resistance. The deal was merely a ruling class attempt to marginalise Sinn Fein and to increase repression and Southern collaboration. FitzGerald and Thatcher pretended to tackle "Catholic alienation" by offering cosmetic reforms. Having street names in Irish did nothing to challenge sectarianism yet loyalists saw their tiny privileges under threat. Hundreds of Catholics were made homeless through intimidation and being burnt out and loyalists staged massive demonstrations against the Agreement.

The Republican Movement had the influence to organise a mass campaign against this repression and bigotry. Yet the IRA concentrated on threatening workers who served the security forces instead of arguing with them that this activity went against their class interests.

The tactics of the Republican Movement flow directly from its failure to hold a class view of society. By stressing either the ballot box or the armalite, the organisation hopes to substitute for mass working class action. Yet neither tactic can drive out the British army. The experience of the election of Bobby Sands MP proves that the British ruling class is not swayed by votes. Similarly, the military struggle of the IRA cannot substitute for mass working class action. Over a decade ago the IRA announced that 1984 would be the year of

victory. It didn't happen. A guerrilla army that is based on a section of the population will not destroy the armed might of British imperialism. Neither military action nor the votes at the ballot box can substitute for the only force that can destroy imperialism in Ireland — the power that is concentrated in the workplaces.

For those reasons, revolutionary socialist stand shoulder to shoulder with republicans in opposing the Orange state. But believing as we do that republicanism as a tradition cannot lead that struggle to a successful conclusion we seek openly to build a Marxist alternative.

8: The revolutionary party

IRISH SOCIETY is in deep crisis. Even the most casual observer notices the alienation and cynicism with conventional politics. The fact is that our rulers no longer have any solutions.

Unionist ascendancy has not been restored in the North. After nearly twenty years, the revolt of Northern nationalists continues. The British state has now recognised the impossibility of developing a middle ground. Instead it has resorted to ever more naked oppression. In practice,that means more open use of the shoot-to-kill policy, more direct support for the loyalists and greater use of the sectarian UDR.

In the South, the conditions that guaranteed stability in the seventies are disappearing. Southern Ireland joined the EEC in 1973. It had one special feature: it was a low-wage economy *inside* the EEC tariff walls. It was an ideal location for US companies to finish off and assemble their products and thus gain admittance to the markets of the EEC. The influx of investment boosted the confidence of Irish capitalism. That confidence transmitted itself through the whole of society. There were increased demands for a more liberal order that stood up to an authoritarian church. There was also a separation of Southern workers from the struggles of Northern nationalists.

But conditions have changed. On a world scale capitalism has not been able to repeat the conditions of near-permanent growth that characterised the fifties and sixties. The old pattern of booms and slumps, once dismissed as Marxist fantasy, have returned. The special conditions that boosted Southern capitalism have also vanished. It is no longer the only country inside the EEC tariffs that can offer itself as a staging-post to US investors. Greece, Portugal and Spain offer alternatives. Yet it is left with a hangover from the seventies in the

form of massive borrowings. It was estimated that at the end of 1984 the accumulated debt stood at £18,500 million — worth more than an entire year's production of the Irish economy.

The ever more vicious competition has driven our rulers to shift the burden of debt onto workers. Today more than 40 per cent of Southern workers pay above the standard rate of tax. By contrast, the employers and the rich are among the least taxed in Europe. Still more "incentives" are offered to private enterprise while the working class is threatened with more cuts. For a period, the bosses' offensive may be successful. The threat of the dole and the hope of a better tomorrow win acceptance for the system. But it cannot last. There are major struggles ahead.

Who will win these confrontations? Will workers spontaneously draw socialist conclusions from their struggles?

These questions can only be answered by looking at the experience. The 1980s have seen fantastic struggles by workers all around the world. In 1981, Solidarity was born amidst a general strike in Poland. In 1983, the workers of Belgium went on a general strike against government cutbacks. In 1984, the miners in Britain and the metal workers of Germany struck for jobs. In 1985, the workers of the Sudan toppled a corrupt dictator. 1986 saw huge struggles in France, China and Spain. And black workers in South Africa have grabbed world headlines over a long period.

Yet most of these struggles ended in defeat. For many cases a reformist leadership sounded the retreat rather than take on the state. This was seen most clearly in Poland. Ten million workers in Solidarity held the power in their hands. But Lech Walesa and the other leaders of the union sought a compromise with the regime. They dared not organise to smash the state. In other countries, the union leaders preached respect for the law in order to win "public opinion" and out of fear of unleashing the power of the working class.

Unfortunately, workers did not spontaneously jump to revolutionary conclusions — despite the potential for revolution inherent in their actions. The traditions of co-existence with the bosses meant that they still placed their trust in reformist leaders. And those leaders have always feared the militancy of their supporters more than the power of the bosses and their state.

Unless an alternative leadership is built within the working class, similar defeats will face us in the future. This is not to argue for a strategy of winning positions at the top of the unions. Quite the reverse. Revolutionary socialists cannot simply sneak into positions

while their fellow workers are passive. An alternative revolutionary leadership has to be built in the course of its struggles on the shop floor. It has to establish itself by the power of its arguments and its ability to offer a way forward.

The revolutionary minority

The core of that alternative is the revolutionary socialist party. Such a party organises a minority. It makes no claims to simply represent all the people as do the republicans or the reformists. Rather it organises those with a clear revolutionary Marxist view of the world. It sustains their ideas in periods of defeat. It holds to arguing for the general interests of the working class against all forms of sectionalism. It aims to give a lead in the course of mass struggles, and in the tiny struggles that rebuilding in the workplace entails.

Such a party is absolutely necessary for two central reasons. Firstly, the ruling class hold their power by a combination of force and consent. The balance varies. But even the most repressive regime must convince a section of workers of its ideas. These ideas make up the stock in trade of "common sense" that is pumped out daily by the media. Yet these ideas divide us from each other. They encourage us to believe that there will always be rulers. They demand from us a commitment to patriotism in order to drown our class interests.

A revolutionary party makes no compromise with the ideas of bourgeois society. It stands out against patriotism and chauvinism. It defends the most oppressed elements in society when they are in danger of being made scapegoats. It offers a working class perspective on all the dominant issues of society. It points to the nature of bourgeois society — attacking illusions that the state and its army and judges are neutral.

Secondly, the bosses and the employers are centrally organised. Their state machine acts as the "management committee" for their wider interests. In periods of major confrontation all the energies of the privileged are called into play. The police and the courts drop all pretence at neutrality. The media set out to lie and demoralise.

Unless workers develop a disciplined, centralised leadership they can never smash the bosses. That leadership has to offer a clear strategy for victory. It has to organise for the moment of insurrection. It has to be able to win the mass of workers to its ideas. Thus, the Bolsheviks in 1917 proved themselves by raising the simple slogan of "all power to the soviets" as the means of guaranteeing land peace and bread.

So what is needed, then, is a revolutionary party of the working class, a party that will organise that minority of workers who see the need to generalise beyond the day-to-day "partial" struggles and go on to challenge the whole system of capitalism. A party that, through its leadership of those day-to-day struggles, through its uncompromising support of all workers who want to *fight*, through its articulation of the revolutionary traditions that have always existed just under the surface, can accelerate the developing consciousness that is inherent in all struggles.

What are the prospects of building that party today?

This pamphlet has attempted to point out the blind alley that is capitalism today. Put simply: on a world scale no serious progress is possible while capitalism remains. Indeed the conditions under which the mas of the world's population live and work get worse as time goes on. Clearly if capitalism has any sort of future it is only on the broken bones of masses of people. Worldwide we are in an epoch of revolution. The objective need for socialism exists, and is greater today than at any time in the past.

But large numbers of workers draw revolutionary conclusions not on the basis of propaganda but on the basis of their own experiences. In particular, workers struggling in defence of pay and conditions, against redundancies and unemployment, for contraception and other rights for women, against the sectarianism of the Northern state, against the cut backs in health and social provision, are more likely to see their "partial" fight as one aspect of a broader, deeper fight against capitalism itself if there exists an organisation arguing for solidarity, arguing to *generalise* the experience of their sectional dispute.

At the time of writing, sectional struggles are at quite a low ebb. The number of strikes — particularly unofficial strikes — is low compared with a few years ago. The same is true of occupations, fights over rights for women, etc, etc. Until there is a revival in sectional struggle the prospects for the creation of a *mass* revolutionary workers' party are not great. But as we have tried to point out, the bosses offensive and downturn in class struggle will not last for ever. And when great struggles break out again — as they most certainly will — whether workers draw revolutionary conclusions in large numbers, or whether the pro-capitalist reformers maintain their influence, depends on whether revolutionaries have managed to build a revolutionary alternative, a minority pole of attraction in the discouraging months and years of downturn.

That is the challenge we offer every reader of this pamphlet. Effort spent building a relatively unpopular, uncompromising revolutionary organisation now will not see large immediate returns. But when the tide turns, those efforts will be repaid a hundred fold.

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